



# Avid Volvere Sequel

'Outstanding sound quality and precision engineering', and that was just the basic model – the Sequel shines even brighter

## Avid Volvere Sequel

PRICE	£3500
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**Avid's Volvere Sequel turntable falls midway between its £2000 'entry-level' Volvere and the £5000 flagship Acutus. At £3500, the Sequel would seem to offer an effective compromise between cost and performance. But the basic Volvere already reaches an extremely high standard. It boasts excellent sonic performance, outstanding build quality, and solid engineering. So, how much difference, subjectively, should one expect? Isn't the 'cooking' Volvere plenty good enough?**

It probably is. Nevertheless, the Sequel offers more – quite a bit more. Listening to the Volvere in isolation, you might think vinyl couldn't get much better – it's that good. Know what? You're

wrong. There's further to go. And the difference isn't subtle. The good news for Volvere owners is the possibility of upgrading existing decks to Sequel standard at a cost of £1500. So you could buy a Volvere, use it for a while, then turn it into a Sequel without paying a premium.

The two turntables are essentially identical, sharing many common parts including base support, platter, and sub-chassis. The difference lies in a superior high-torque motor and beefier out-board power supply for the Sequel. For me, having lived very happily with a Volvere since the end of 2001, it was interesting to move up. The Volvere has no obvious faults or limitations, and I felt entirely happy with its performance. So, what sort of things might improve?

Avid designer Conrad Mas gave me a quick taste of the Sequel shortly before its launch at the Bristol 2002 Show. And very good it sounded. But, if I'm honest, at the time the difference over the Volvere didn't strike me as huge. There was greater speed stability and a general firming-up of the overall presentation. The Sequel was slightly

tighter and cleaner. By comparison, the Volvere was a shade looser and more relaxed – though still admirably solid and controlled.

When I finally heard the Sequel at home (having got thoroughly used to the Volvere over 18 months) there seemed much more difference. Immediately apparent were the gains in speed, stability and solidity, as previously noted. On difficult and demanding material – such as piano, harpsichord, classical guitar – the Sequel offered the sort of rock-like consistency one takes for granted when listening to CD. There's a sense of security that's very reassuring; it feels as if nothing could upset the flow of the music.

Dynamic range was enhanced, and there was increased contrast between loud and soft; climaxes expanded more. Compared to the Volvere, the Sequel's soundstaging was noticeably more holographic. Images projected out of the speaker boxes in a manner suggesting height as well as depth and width. It's almost as though the speakers had grown a couple of metres taller! Everything sounded bigger and more alive – as if it were



and tonally under-nourished. All in all the sort of recording that got early digital (and DG/Archiv) something of a bad name. Eventually, the set was issued on CD. But, even in pristine DDD digital form, the same sort of problems were apparent – indicating that the LPs were probably reflecting the quality of the original master tapes.

A lost cause? I thought so. Yet playing these same LPs on the Sequel one could suddenly discern believable spatial depth and dimensionality. The balance remained close, immediate, and sharp; only now, both players were focused and distinct in a tangible acoustic. Their instruments sounded vivid and holographic, rather than like flat two-dimensional cardboard cut-outs. And what about the pitch stability! The Volvere is excellent by any standards; the Sequel is better still – absolutely rock-solid.

The slow introduction to the first sonata is very testing. Goebel plays without vibrato, and his lean, at times almost vinegary tone, is very exposed. And there's the harpsichord; an instrument where even the slightest pitch waver or tremor stands out. Being an original digital recording, pitch stability (in terms of wow and flutter) is theoretically perfect. Going back through past analogue recordings of Bach's violin and harpsichord sonatas, on LP and CD, one realises how few were totally free of pitch waver.

The question is, how demanding should one be with LP? If a disc is pressed even fractionally off-centre, pitch stability suffers, no matter how good the turntable and how perfect the original recording. Having Goebel's Bach violin sonatas recording on CD, I know how secure they can sound. Theoretically, LP can never be as good as CD in this respect. But, on Avid's Sequel, pitch stability was subjectively comparable to that found from silver disc reproduction – but with a much truer, more holographic sonic presentation.

Put simply, the music sounded better. And by

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somewhat more three-dimensional and vivid.

At any given volume level, the Sequel seemed to sound a shade louder. As a consequence, it proved possible to reduce volume levels slightly while retaining subjectively comparable loudness. One immediate benefit of this was the reduction in background noise – often to vanishingly low levels. The sound had a very impressive presence, making it seem as though voices and instruments were really projecting out – almost coming to greet you – rather than remaining localised in and around the loudspeaker areas.

Alas, the Volvere (once my pride and joy) now seemed slightly 'flat' and monochromatic! Dare I say it, more CD-like. That's not meant as a compliment. It's easy to forget that LP can (when everything's right) create impressive, vivid three-dimensional effects that CD still finds hard to

equal. The overall result is somehow greater than the sum of the parts, and difficult to describe in just a few words. It's one of the reasons vinyl is still worth bothering with.

One particular recording that showcased the Sequel's magic was Reinhard Goebel playing Bach's sonatas for violin and harpsichord on DG's Archiv label – an early digital recording from 1982/3. I've had the LPs for 20 years, but always found them difficult to reproduce. Tonally, Goebel's violin usually sounds thin and reedy; likewise, the harpsichord will lack weight and richness. Also, left-right stereo separation between the two instruments is extreme – so creating a curious disembodied effect.

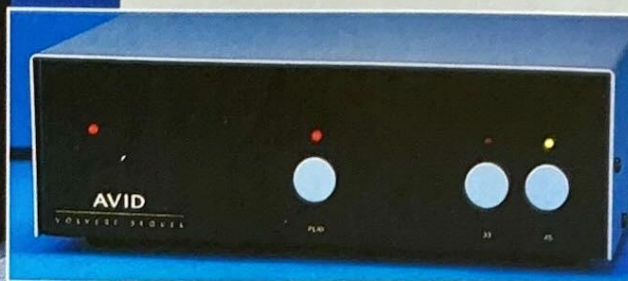
The balance between violin and harpsichord is not wholly believable. The sound is close and dry but, paradoxically, at the same time ill-focused

'better' I mean truer, more believable, more natural, and more real. Suppose Goebel's Bach sonatas set was a brand-new recording I'd not heard before; were I hearing it for the first time on Avid's Sequel, I'd never guess how thin and disembodied the sound could be when played on lesser equipment. It was quite amazing the way the Volvere Sequel turntable magically created a vivid three-dimensional soundstage that had width, depth, and height.

Actually, that's wrong; I should say 'revealed', rather than 'created'. The Sequel's 'holographic' presentation is definitely not a false effect superimposed on each recording. Rather, the Sequel simply seems to reveal more of what's there. By comparison, the Volvere gave a more predictable and uniform presentation. The Sequel was more varied; better able to reveal individuality in terms



The Avid VolvereSequel boasts a superior high-torque motor and beefier outboard power supply over its predecessor



of ambience portrayal, soundstaging, stereo placement, and, best of all for me, the tiniest subtleties in the manner of the playing itself.

The Sequel offers a highly cohesive musical presentation. Timing is outstanding, making rhythmic detail more telling. As a result, each musical performance gains in terms of purposefulness – if it's a fast driving piece, there's a greater sense of the music moving forwards. If it's slower, there's an increased feeling of ebb and flow – more sense of phrases being shaped and caressed. The music sounds so much more characterful; more true to itself.

In some respects, tempi seem slightly faster

sound like a team effort with everyone playing together. My US pressing is not the quietest, but the Sequel minimised background ticks and pops, projecting the music over the noise cleanly and powerfully into the room.

I don't know how *Rainbow Seeker* was recorded – whether it was single takes with everyone playing together 'live' in the studio, or track-by-track with lots of over-dubs. Subjectively, depending on the equipment being used, it can seem like either. Usually, it just sounds like a collection of individual parts that fit together very well; occasionally you play it and experience real performances where people strike sparks off one-

replaced, and the various drive surfaces cleaned. The result was a noticeably faster take-up, and more importantly, the sound improved. Definition increased, and everything seemed much more crisp and better focused.

Which just goes to demonstrate the importance of a clean, solid drive. Even with a heavy 5kg platter, a high torque motor, and massive power supply, all can come to naught if belt and driving surfaces aren't clean and in perfect condition. Actually, some turntables benefit from a little belt-slippage (remember putting Mr Sheen on Linn belts?); it helps iron-out the 'cogging' effects of poorly regulated synchronous motors. That the

## The Volvere Sequel presents a highly cohesive musical picture, and timing is outstanding, making rhythmic detail far more telling

with the Sequel. The pace is crisper; phrasing more articulate. Yet this is at best only half the story. Because basslines are stronger and more solidly anchored, the music doesn't airily rush by. Perhaps because the sound is actually clearer, you've slightly more time to digest the totality of what's happening. It's easier to assimilate what's going on. Almost as though things were occurring at a less frenetic pace.

The Sequel gives the lower frequencies greater power and weight. Basslines seem enhanced – less buried in the mix – while at the same time going deeper. I've noticed this time and again with superior audio components; basslines seem to cut-through more cleanly, letting you follow (say) bass guitar parts more easily. Orchestral double basses come through more audibly too, allowing you to hear distinct pitch values, rather than a nondescript, gruff rasp.

Playing various tracks from Joe Sample's LP *Rainbow Seeker* demonstrated the extra presence and fluidity of the bass parts. This album is a very good test of cohesion; there's bags of individual detail to seduce the ear, but ultimately it must

another. The Sequel gave the latter. It really doesn't get any better than that...

Conrad Mas himself converted my Volvere to a Sequel in under an hour. It worked immediately and seemed fine, but Conrad wasn't happy. The time taken for the platter to reach operating speed from a standing start was too long, he said, indicating transmission problems. So the belt was

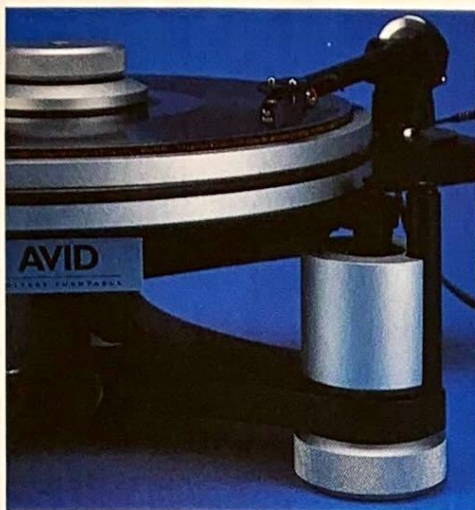
opposite is true with the Sequel indicates the quality of Avid's outboard power supply [see the Technology box on page 29].

I used the Sequel with Avid's version of Rega's RB300 tonearm, fitting it with the latest Temper W moving-coil cartridge from Transfiguration. Although there's something of a mismatch here on paper – expensive turntable and cartridge/relatively cheap tonearm – the combination worked extremely well. Tracking proved excellent, and surface noise (background hiss and ticks, and louder clicks and pops) was very low and well controlled. Rumble is virtually non-existent.

No turntable, even one as good as Avid's Sequel, can totally eliminate LP surface noise. But on a good, clean, quiet pressing there should be little or no noise to speak of. Even when playing worn or damaged records, the Sequel succeeds in focusing the music so that it projects over any noise that might be present. It's as though the noise itself is in a different acoustic plane – behind the music, if that makes sense. Having a good phono stage helps too.

The Sequel's platter is permanently fitted with





A 5kg platter has a fixed cork mat, with solid clamp to flatten warped records, all held secure on the suspended sub-chassis, held on rubber 'O' rings



a cork mat, and a raised brass housing near the centre spindle pushes the centre part of the LP up slightly, allowing the clamp to tighten down on the edge of the label, thereby flattening warped or dished records. This makes using the supplied clamp or an external record weight more or less essential – otherwise the LP edges float free of the mat. Unlike some clamps, the Sequel's does not mark the LP centre label.

Being an open skeletal design, there's no supplied hinged lid. However, Avid offers two lid options. The first is a simple cover to protect the platter from dust and the tonearm/cartridge from prying fingers; the second (which I haven't seen) is a larger cover, designed to keep the whole assembly dust-free and protected when not in use. Being open in construction, the Sequel's a bit of a dust trap. But it's easily dismantled for cleaning when the time comes.

With CD having been around for over 20 years, and some form of super disc like SACD hyped to replace it, it's remarkable to find LP still part of the serious audiophile's agenda. And not just holding on by its finger-tips, but gathering strength. Turntables like Avid's Sequel enable vinyl to compete at the very highest level, offering

breathtaking. To think that something so technologically crude and unpromising – a lump of black plastic being scraped by a diamond tip – can produce music that captivates and moves is nothing less than a minor miracle.

## Turtables like Avid's Sequel enable vinyl to compete with CDs at the highest level

a vivid holographic presentation that's impressive and exciting. But that in itself does not explain why LP has such a hold over audiophiles.

Perhaps it's the wealth of material on LP for second-hand collectors – so many unusual things still turn up, and there's still so much of the LP back catalogue that hasn't been issued on CD. I don't know about you, but I nearly always feel a bit smug and virtuous listening to material on vinyl that's unobtainable on CD. Especially when the sound is fabulously clear and flawless.

When such an LP is played on a turntable of Avid Sequel standards, the results can be

Inevitably, the Avid Volvere Sequel costs a lot of money. But how could something so lavishly and extravagantly be built on the cheap? Buying the best has always been an expensive proposition. Importantly, I'd say a Volvere Sequel represents good value for money. I mean, how do you put a price on transforming your entire LP collection? Or your life? You can't!

On the other side of the Atlantic in Hollywood, sequels aren't always an unqualified success (to say the least); but this blockbuster from Cambridgeshire most certainly is. ■

Jimmy Hughes

### Technology

The Sequel's power supply is the same as the one used in Avid's flagship Acutus model, and drives a powerful synchronous motor producing around 140Nm torque – compared to about 55Nm for the Volvere. The Sequel's motor is similar to that in the Acutus, except that Avid does a complete rebuild for the latter to reduce vibration and noise to an absolute minimum.

Another design detail that helps explain the excellent pitch stability of Avid turntables is the use of three special rubber 'O' rings to centre the suspension. These stabilise the suspended sub-chassis, reducing undesirable tendencies towards lateral movement, but without compromising vertical isolation. It's a very simple idea; inexpensive to implement and straightforward in application. But it has an important effect on sound quality. It means you get the benefits of a suspended sub-chassis – increased isolation from acoustic feedback and footfall; reduced transfer of noise and vibration from the motor – while maintaining a firm, solid drive between motor and platter. As a consequence, bass sounds tighter and firmer, while things like pitch stability and stereo focus are improved. It also takes much of the tweakiness out of the design, reducing the importance of tonearm cable dressing/clamping as a provider of lateral control.

### Features

- Brings out the three-dimensionality of music
- Increased bass weight, and reduced noise
- Upgrade path from regular Volvere turntable